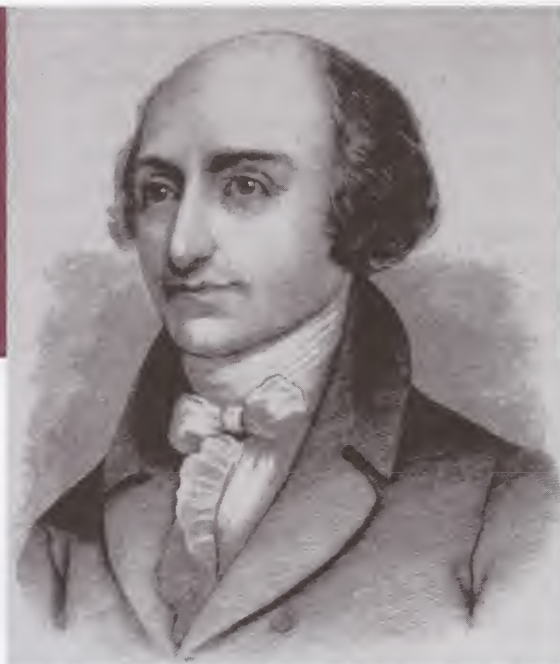


Albert Gallatin

Master of Finance

ALBERT GALLATIN was one of the most important and influential men of the early American Republic. Born in Geneva, Switzerland, on January 29, 1761, he was baptized Abraham Alfonse Albert Gallatin. Through his father, Jean Gallatin, he was a descendant of a family prominent for generations in the Duchy of Savoy. After the city of Geneva established its independence in 1535, the Gallatins had an almost unbroken succession as that city's councilors and great lords.



Gallatin was age two when his father died and orphaned at age nine when his mother, Sophie Albertine (Rolaz du Rosey) Gallatin, died. He was raised by Mademoiselle Catherine Pictet, a distant relative of his father's, an intimate friend of his mother's, and a kindly woman who won her ward's lasting gratitude. His distinguished heritage, the influences of an enlightened Geneva, and an excellent education at Geneva Academy produced a refined, polished young gentleman. Although by 1779 Gallatin was expected to choose a profession, he refused his grandmother's offer to obtain a military commission as a lieutenant colonel in the mercenary troops of Friedrich II, Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel, on behalf of King George III of England, to fight against patriots in the American Revolution.

From all sides he felt pressures to enter professions for which he did not feel suited. A few weeks before his nineteenth birthday, Gallatin left behind a fortune and social position and, along with a friend, secretly fled to the "the freest country of the universe." After a long voyage, they landed in Massachusetts in 1780. Although Gallatin refused to fight against American freedom, the patriot in him had not yet

emerged. He had come to the new land for his own liberty; and he brought with him not ammunition to fight with, but tea to sell in Boston. He also taught French language at Harvard College (later University). While in Richmond, Virginia, in 1782, as the agent of a European commercial house, he befriended Revolutionary patriot and the governor of Virginia, Patrick Henry, who advised Gallatin to purchase land in the Ohio and Monongahela valleys.

In Boston he met M. Savary, who represented a firm in Lyons, France, with a claim against Virginia. Joining Savary as a companion and interpreter, they traveled to Philadelphia where they became interested in land speculation. Savary bought land warrants for 120,000 acres adjoining the "Washington bottom lands" on the south side of the Ohio River and gave one-quarter (later one-half) share in the enterprise to young Gallatin on the condition that Gallatin personally attend to the land's development until his twenty-fifth birthday in 1786 when Gallatin could afford to pay for his shares. Mlle. Pictet had forgiven

her foster son for running off to America and bestowed an inheritance that allowed him to marry and purchase land.

In the spring of 1784, Gallatin and a small exploratory party crossed the Alleghenies and established a temporary headquarters and store at Clare's Farm along the Monongahela River in Fayette County, Pennsylvania. While there, Gallatin picked the site of his future home, which he named Friendship Hill. In 1785 Gallatin moved to Richmond, Virginia, where he took the Oath of Allegiance to his new country.

By 1789 the first part of his home near New Geneva

was completed and Gallatin brought his wife, Sophia Allegre of Richmond, Virginia, to his wooded Pennsylvania retreat. Life in the Pennsylvania wilderness was unkind to her and she died within a few months. She is buried on the grounds of Friendship Hill.

Gallatin's Friendship Hill is a fine example of Federal style brick architecture. While most of the original woodwork did not survive due to fire and alterations, the original fireplace mantel can be seen today. By 1798, a frame addition expanded the brick house to accommodate the growing family of Gallatin and his second wife Hannah Nicholson of New York, whom he

had married November 1, 1794. His final additions, planned for his retirement and supervised by his son, Albert Rolaz Gallatin, were a stone house and kitchen, begun in 1821 and completed in 1824. Other owners have since made modifications, including a state dining room (1895), south bedroom wing (1902), and servants' quarters (1903). Today Friendship Hill is administered by the



Gallatin's home, Friendship Hill (1789), is a National Park Service site open to the public. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/frhi.

National Park Service and is open to the public.

Although Gallatin was never a very successful land speculator or farmer, he had other economic interests in Fayette County. Prime among these was a glass factory he had built in 1796 in New Geneva. This was the first factory of its kind west of the Allegheny Mountains and after being relocated to Greensboro, Pennsylvania, became his most "productive property." His superior talents marked him as a leader of the homespun democracy of western Pennsylvania.

He made his political debut in September 1788 as a member of a Harrisburg conference to consider revi-

sions to the United States Constitution, which Pennsylvania had ratified the previous December. Gallatin was perhaps the most radically minded individual at the conference. In a speech there, he conceded the inadequacy of the Articles of Confederation, but attacked the vagueness and the centralizing features of the Constitution and called for a much weaker federal government. His proposals proved too extreme for most of the delegates, who modified them during the remaining days of the meeting. Finally, they drew up a petition calling upon the Pennsylvania legislature to request Congress summon, "at the earliest opportunity," a convention with powers to amend the Constitution. Twelve amendments were suggested, including four suggested by Gallatin: Congress's powers should be limited to those stated in the Constitution; there should be one representative for each twenty thousand persons; election of congressmen should be controlled by the Constitution, not by Congress itself; and Congress should be able to assess, levy, and collect the direct-tax quota of any state that did not promptly furnish its quota.

The Pennsylvania legislature never acted on the meeting's suggestions, and although the Bill of Rights added two amendments to the Constitution that paralleled suggestions made at Harrisburg, these were along lines similar to those previously proposed by the ratifying conventions in several states. Therefore, the meeting can be counted as one among a number of belated and futile attempts to bring about revision of the Constitution made by groups which had earlier opposed its ratification.

In the winter of 1789-90, Gallatin sat in the convention that revised the Pennsylvania Constitution. At that meeting he engaged in lively debates on suffrage, representation, taxation, and the judiciary. In October 1790, he was elected as a state representative from Fayette County and was re-elected without contest in 1791 and 1792. His greatest service to the state, foretelling his service to the nation, was in the field of financial legislation. A hatred of debt begun in his boyhood

led him to devote much time to figure out ways to reduce the public debt. As part of his fiscal policy he was instrumental in obtaining a charter for the Bank of Pennsylvania.

In 1793, Gallatin, although a Democratic-Republican, was elected United State senator, 55 to 34, by the Federalist-dominated state legislature to represent the Commonwealth in the Third Congress. The Federalists in Congress, however, were not as politically disposed to Gallatin as their brethren in Pennsylvania and denied him his seat in the Senate by a vote of fourteen to twelve, claiming that he had not been an American citizen for the nine years as prescribed by the Constitution. After this defeat, Gallatin sold his western lands to Robert Morris for £4,000, Pennsylvania money, payable (but not paid) in three yearly installments, and returned home with his family to Friendship Hill.

During the time that he was absent from his home, the federal government's decision to collect the taxes on whiskey under Alexander Hamilton's excise bill of 1791 had provoked a wave of discontent that spread among the farmers in the western part of the state. David Bradford of Washington, Pennsylvania, stirred the disgruntled farmers to action. They held angry meetings, raised a militia, terrorized Pittsburgh, and forced revenue officers to flee for their lives.

Gallatin courageously moved into this superheated atmosphere. He had his doubts about the constitutionality of the whiskey levy, but his chief objection to it was that it "will bear hard upon the honest and industrious citizens whilst the wealthy and conniving parts of the community will avoid payments by stratagems." Although he opposed the law, he preached for peaceable submission to it. On August 14, 1794, he spoke to a rally of the farmers' delegates at Parkinson's Ferry, along the Monongahela River, south of Pittsburgh; and later in the month, at a meeting held in a hastily-built shed in Brownsville, Fayette County. His reasoned, logical arguments convinced members of the rebel committee, including the firebrand Bradford, to vote to recommend

that their followers peacefully accede to the law. After the meeting adjourned, a handful of die-hard spectators loitered about the meeting place vaguely talking about way-laying Gallatin as he left Brownsville, but with the desertion of Bradford, they lacked resolution and Gallatin safely returned home.

During the two weeks after the meeting, Gallatin traveled through Fayette County urging people to submit to the law, and to present themselves at their polling places on September 11, when all adult male citizens would receive a pardon for past offenses upon promising good conduct in the future. It can almost be said that Gallatin helped save western Pennsylvania from civil war. When federal troops, sent by President George Washington and under the command of Governor Henry Lee of Virginia, arrived to put down the rebellion, they found, instead of "embattled farmers" to subdue, only a few flagrant lawbreakers who were taken back to Philadelphia for trial. None were convicted. Hamilton, who had led the troops as far as Pittsburgh, remained in that city trying to prove Gallatin had helped to cause the disturbance. No proof was found, but for the rest of his life his political enemies persisted in reviving the charge that Gallatin was the chief instigator of the Whiskey Rebellion. The federal government had placed Gallatin on a list of rebels because they did not distinguish between moderates and rebels. Later, Gallatin would say that his involvement was his "only political sin."



Gallatin's diplomatic skills are credited with easing the tensions of the Whiskey Rebellion and preventing a civil war in western Pennsylvania. (from The American Past)

In the autumn of 1794, citizens of western Pennsylvania, pleased with the role he played in settling the insurrection, elected Gallatin to the U. S. House of Representatives. Re-elected twice, he served from 1795 to 1801. In Congress, he insisted upon a strict accounting of the treasury to Congress, and in 1800, he was instrumental in steering legislation through the House which required the secretary of the treasury to make a yearly accounting of funds to the Congress. When James Madison and William Branch Giles retired from the House in 1797, Gallatin became the acknowledged leader of the Democratic-Republican faction in the House. His last days in Congress were spent leading the fight for the selection of Jefferson as president over Aaron Burr. With Jefferson's victory, and with Gallatin's expertise in financial matters, Gallatin became the most logical appointee as secretary of the treasury. He held that office longer than any other man in American history, serving from 1801 to 1814. Once in office, he vigorously attacked the public debt, which had reached 40 percent of the gross

national product, a figure not seen again until the Great Depression in the 1930s. Through careful management of the country's finances and the frugal administrations of Presidents Jefferson and Madison, he was able to cut the national debt in half, until the War of 1812 made this policy impossible. Gallatin was also instrumental, along with Thomas Paine and Secretary of State James Madison, in convincing President Jefferson that the Louisiana Purchase, which nearly doubled the territory of the United States in 1803, was constitutionally sound.

After 1811, it became increasingly unpleasant for him to remain as secretary of the treasury. It was with a feeling of great relief that in May 1813, at the request of President Madison, he went to Russia to study the details of a Russian offer to mediate Anglo-American differences. He stayed in Russia several months, but nothing came of the Russian offer. In 1814, he was one of the five American commissioners who negotiated the Treaty of Ghent which ended hostilities between Great Britain and the United States. With the failure of Congress to renew the charter of the First Bank of the United States in 1811 and the tripling of the national debt for the war, Gallatin found it advantageous to resign in 1814.

After the treaty was signed, he revisited his birthplace of Geneva for the first time in thirty-five years before returning to America in 1816. He next accepted the post of American minister to France, an office which he held for seven years. In 1823, he and his family once again returned to America where they lived a year in the new stone mansion at Friendship Hill which had been built under the supervision of his son Albert Jr. It was

during this stay in 1825 that Gallatin's longtime friend, the Marquis de Lafayette, on his triumphal tour of the United States, visited the Gallatins at their estate overlooking the Monongahela.

Gallatin originally intended to live out his days as a gentleman farmer, but he yielded to his family's longing for the cultural and social opportunities they had enjoyed in cities such as Paris, Washington, and New York. In 1826, he accepted an appointment as American ambassador to the Court of St. James, Great Britain. Returning from London the next year, he finally retired from public life and settled in New York City. There in 1831, at the urging of his lifelong friend John Jacob Astor, America's first multimillionaire, he became the president of the new National (later Gallatin) Bank, a post he held until 1839. In 1832, Gallatin forever broke his long ties with Pennsylvania when he sold his Friendship Hill home to Albert Mellier Jr., a Frenchman whom he had met in Paris.

Gallatin's later years in New York were given over to benevolent and intellectual attainments. In 1831, he was a founder of the University of the City of New York (later New York University) and an early president of the New York Historical Society. He also undertook the studies of the American Indian and their languages which brought him the title of "the father of American ethnology."

Gallatin and John Russell Bartlett founded the American Ethnological Society in New York City in 1842. He remained active and vigorous until his eighty-seventh year. The shock of the death of his wife in 1849 seriously weakened him, and on August 12, 1849, he died at the country home of his



*Glass bottles of the type made at Gallatin's
New Geneva Glassworks in the early
nineteenth century.
(National Park Service)*



*Daguerreotype of Albert Gallatin in his later years, believed to be by Anthony, Edwards, and Company.
(Library of Congress)*

daughter Frances at Astoria, Queens County, New York City. Having outlived the founders of the Republic, he was buried in Trinity Churchyard, Manhattan, near the tomb of Alexander Hamilton.

Text by Irwin Richman and Fred J. Lauver

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